

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Employees sometimes come to me with complaints about difficult coworkers, but too often it's late in the game and to the point when the relationships have deteriorated. How can I encourage employees to deal with their issues sooner?



I've an employee who's somewhat flirtatious in the office. There have been no complaints yet, and he's a great guy. Still, I think he's a little too forward at times. Others disagree. I've been quiet so far, but I'm worried about it. How should I respond?

Answers



Most problem relationships become difficult because coworkers fail to sit down and work out differences early on. Here's a prevention strategy: 1) Have more frequent contact with your employees in a group setting where you can model appropriate communication, set a tone for cooperation, and allow employees to see you interacting with their peers. Over time, your style will establish a nonverbal, almost unconscious, standard of communication that employees will imitate; 2) Have more one-on-one interactions with employees so you learn about emerging conflicts and can offer guidance sooner; 3) Increase employees' motivation to address their issues sooner. Disavow the "fix-it" role. Instead, explain that when interpersonal conflicts are brought to your attention, the conflict won't be dissected in order to establish who's to blame. Instead, conflicts will be resolved in the most expedient manner, and both parties could find that solution undesirable. Consider referring them to the EAP, and remember that you can always call EAP and talk about strategies that might be helpful.



Sexual harassment isn't a problem when behavior in the workplace between the sexes is pleasant and friendly. Where laws surrounding sexual harassment exist, they generally don't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or minor isolated incidents. In the workplace, harassment may be considered illegal when it's frequent or severe such that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the offender being fired or demoted, or when the victim decides to quit the job). Still, consult with your human resources staff about your discomfort with this behavior, its frequency, and the degree to which it appears. Also, you can't go wrong by being proactive and periodically reminding all employees about the sexual harassment policy and personally mentioning your strong disapproval of sexual harassment. Employees will take their cues from the tone and expectations you set for the workplace.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



Some of my employees procrastinate. Can you coach me in helping them get their work done on time? There must be things I can do to help them break this habit. I know badgering, threatening, and cajoling won't work.



I've always been praised for my attention to detail, but, unfortunately, it's actually a part of my micromanagement problem. I'm trying to change, but how?



I know what bullying in the workplace means, but what's "mobbing" in the workplace?

Answers



Although all procrastinate and everyone knows what procrastination is, resolving the procrastination problems your employees face isn't a one-solution-fits-all situation. There are many resources to help employees with this problem, but each employee's procrastination problem is unique. While one employee may be easily distracted, another may need better organizational skills. Some employees may have health or mental health issues such as depression that contribute to low levels of productivity, and others may have a substance abuse issue. Dozens of reasons exist, but procrastination in each case is a symptom. When you have troubled employees, contact the EAP to discuss each one separately. Then, with the help of the EAP, decide on the approach you wish to take.



Most people know that micromanagement defines behavior associated with difficulty in delegating work, but this is only part of the story. Micromanagement occurs when supervisors become overly obsessed with the extreme details of the job and thereby overly control the work of subordinates. Coaching by another supervisor who knows how to delegate and how to spot micromanagement behaviors is a crucial step in your plan for change. Contacting the EAP is also strongly recommended to help you. Some of the issues behind micromanagement include resistance to change, insecurity in your role, organizational culture issues that contribute to the pressure to control work, concern over the stability of your position, and anger at others when they make decisions without your approval.



Mobbing is a form of bullying. It's used in the literature to describe a group of employees bullying another employee, as opposed to bullying perpetrated by a single employee. Supervisors may be unaware of mobbing because employee behavior is often covert. An example of an aggressive form of mobbing is a group of employees targeting another employee using rumor, innuendo, intimidation, and isolation in order to force that person to resign. Mobbing takes a significant psychological toll on victims, including consequential problems of low productivity, depression, and emotional distress. If you identify mobbing behavior in the workplace, act to end it immediately, refer victims to the EAP for support, and incorporate the EAP in any plan that includes corrective action for perpetrators.